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ABSTRACT

The "speech methods" course can be made more meaningful to its students, and more manageable for its faculty, by the development and use of a pre-methods sequence of teacher preparation which involves advising, focusing content and assignments, and providing occasional seminar sessions for the speech education students and their teachers. While involving a little extra time along the way, the pre-methods sequence nevertheless makes maximum use of both faculty and student time and improves the methods experience itself by: (1) starting with a sound program; (2) using what is available; (3) focusing specific assignments as necessary; and (4) adding to it as little as possible. The essential undergraduate curriculum can help students obtain a position, serve as an effective member of a group and an organization, negotiate issues, support colleagues, relate to supervisors, and make presentations to parent-teacher associations, school boards, and voters. Both the content and processes of a well-developed speech communication program can enhance the careers and professional lives of future teachers. (RAE)

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Speech Communication Courses as Basics in Teacher Preparation

by

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Teacher certification requirements and teacher education programs vary from institution to institution but for the small college offering elementary or secondary certification either in education or in speech education, methods courses as well as special courses in classroom communication for the teacher are frequently taught as overloads by members of the speech communication faculty.

This paper will look at ways courses in the general offerings of the speech communication department can be utilized by speech faculty to make the "speech methods" course more effective and more efficient, as well as ways these general offerings can benefit all education students both in their future classrooms and in their professional development.

The "speech methods" course can be made more meaningful to its students and more manageable for its faculty by the development and use of a pre-methods sequence of teacher preparation which involves advising, focusing content and assignments, and providing occasional seminar sessions for the speech education students and their teachers. While involving a little extra time along the way, the pre-methods sequence nevertheless makes maximum use of both faculty and student time and improves the methods experience itself.

For such a pre-methods sequence to be most effective, the general speech curriculum must provide both depth and breadth of offerings. One, in effect,

> starts with a sound program,
> uses what is available,
> focuses it as necessary,
> and adds to it as little as possible.

First, start with a sound program. Speech education students, like all education students, need to be well prepared in both academic content and in ways of communicating that content effectively to their future classes. Fortunately, for speech communication majors that second task is, in a broad sense, included in the first. If the heart of education is the teacher, the heart

of teaching is communication. Good teachers not only know their subject matter, they are effective in both relaying it and relating it to their students. A speech communication program which involves doing speech communication for a variety of audiences and in a variety of contexts and settings, and stresses understanding of and adaptation to those audience, is helping to prepare future teachers. If the future teachers and their teachers recognize and utilize this factor, the speech program can help make the students' learning process form a foundation for their future teaching processes.

But, first things first--and while acknowledging the role of communication in teaching, a teacher must be firmly grounded in content. Although most elementary and secondary school teachers majoring in speech communication will not likely have the opportunity to offer many courses, their thorough grounding in the discipline of speech communication will help them to make the courses they do teach as rich and meaningful as possible for their students.

The "Essential Undergraduate Curriculum in Speech Communication" developed at the Hope College summer conference of 1985 and subsequently endorsed by the Committee on Small College Speech Programs of the Speech Communication Association provides both depth and breadth within the context of a small college curriculum. I know from experience it can be taught by a faculty of one, using lots of energy and the resources of the institution as a whole. I also know it isn't easy... For a faculty of 2 or 3, however, the curriculum works well.

The group of courses I'm referring to as the "Essential Undergraduate Curriculum in Speech Communication" is the outcome of the summer 1985 conference organized by Roger Smitter, then of Albion College, and Joe MacDoniels of Hope College. Smitter and Buzza (1987) outlined the background and outcomes of that conference:

> Three tasks were set up: Identification of a body of knowledge which all speech communication undergraduates should possess; selection of a core of courses to be required of all majors; and identification of a list of courses which departments should offer.
>
> The conference enrolled thirty-six faculty from thirty-two colleges in twenty states nationwide.... Participants were encouraged to rid themselves of the particular constraints and demands of their own departments and identify what should be offered to undergraduates....

Conference participants approved the following content areas or courses as essential to an undergraduate curriculum in speech communication:

public speaking
interpersonal communication
small group communication
understanding mass media
organizational communication
persuasion
argumentation and debate
rhetorical analysis
oral interpretation
voice and diction (including the development of language abilities and the vocal mechanism)
introduction to human speech communication
communication and rhetorical theory
communication ethics
communication issues (topics in communication)
senior seminar (an integrative, upper division course)
practica or internships
independent study

From these essential content areas, five core courses, which should be required of all undergraduates in speech communication, were identified: public speaking, interpersonal communication, small group communication, understanding mass media, and communication and rhetorical theory. [The latter was assumed to be an upper division course.] The participants also endorsed the concept of all majors having an integrative senior seminar in the discipline." (page 64)

It should be noted that in some cases the course content above might be provided by some department other than speech communication, perhaps argumentation by the philosophy department or voice and diction by the theatre department. The content areas should, however, be available to the student in the small college curriculum.

A good student, majoring in a sound speech communication program with the Essential Undergraduate Curriculum available and the core courses required, should be well prepared in the content area of speech communication.

These courses should be thoughtfully developed in terms of varied communication format as well as content, providing the students with experience in relating to each other effectively in interpersonal exchanges, understanding themselves and others and responding to the values and perspectives each has, planning and giving public speeches and group discussions, giving feedback and criticism appropriately, analyzing and presenting arguments, preparing seminar contributions, and doing independent work--to assure that the speech education student will have experienced a range of communication tasks and methods as well as content areas.

By providing this range of opportunity within the curriculum, the speech communication instructor can utilize available offerings to enhance the pre-methods experience of the speech education education student.

The pre-methods experience can be developed further, however, by focusing specific assignments to make them more directly relevant to the needs of future teachers. If one is to do an interview role-play, for example, the speech education students can role-play a parent-teacher conference instead of a typical job interview, or if they work with job interviews they can do them targeted toward teaching positions. When preparing a group discussion on communication problems within the community, a group of education students might present their discussion on the multi-racial classroom; when doing an informative speech, the student might teach a communication concept; when doing a seminar paper on communication responsibility, the student might consider the special ethical responsibilities of the classroom. The non-education students will benefit from the presentations, since education will continue to be a part of their lives if they become parents or in their roles of informed citizens, and the education students will have learned by both content and method of presentation.

The Essential Undergraduate Curriculum in Speech Communication is a sound beginning and it can be used within the small college context to the benefit of future teachers. Ideally and realistically the speech education students can be identified early and can work closely with both the education department and the speech communication department in shaping their total academic program. After all, we claim as one of the benefits of the small college context our ability to adapt to individual student needs. While using this curriculum to its full extent, and focusing it to help create a pre-methods sequence, several minor additions to the curriculum will enrich its usefulness. They are careful advising, focused

assignments in other disciplines, and the use of occasional seminar sessions for the speech education majors.

Advising should not be limited to content areas, but should give a consideration to the approaches and teaching methods in the various courses the student would take throughout the college itself. The student should be exposed to varied content areas, presentation formats, and teaching styles. Good teachers in any discipline should be experienced, by enrolling in their courses or by visiting classes and attending special presentations they might give if enrollment is not possible.

Assistance of faculty members in other departments can be sought, so that focused assignments might be used in other courses to assist the speech education student in the pre-methods sequence. The suggestions of other faculty members can benefit the student, and the involvement of faculty throughout the college in the preparation of future teachers can benefit the total teacher education program.

Finally, speech education students should meet with their speech communication teachers, and if possible with their education or teaching methods teachers, once or twice a semester in an informal seminar session. The group can discuss how content and methods of ongoing speech classes might have special relevance for speech education students, the success of focused assignments, and other experiences or activities that might be incorporated into the pre-methods sequence. In addition, this fosters a sense of identity and *esprit de corps* among the students and helps develop a foundation for the methods course in the future.

By making use of the pre-methods sequence, the methods course then becomes a capstone experience which makes use of advanced assignments and exercises. It doesn't come as a surprise to either the teacher or the student, or receive as much hasty preparation as an unanticipated overload course might receive. The speech methods experience is developed over time and with consultation between students and teachers, both in speech communication and in education, so that it can become an efficient and meaningful activity for all concerned. By monitoring the speech education student s progress throughout his or her career in the speech department and in selected electives, areas needing special attention--whether in content, presentational style, or classroom management--can be addressed over time and in smaller increments. Few if any additional courses should be necessary beyond the normal offerings of the speech communication department, except for the methods course itself. This course is enhanced by the pre-methods courses and seminar discussions, so it too becomes a

part of the progression of experiences for the students and the teachers rather than being added on at a time when it is not particularly convenient.

Start with a sound program, use its full potential, focus it into pre-methods experiences, and add to it as little as possible. This perspective may involve a little more time spent along the way, but it will both save time and provide a better speech methods experience for all concerned.

When one considers the pre-methods experience, by the way, do not neglect the extra-curricular and co-curricular offerings of the department and "neighboring" departments, or in-house internships, departmental assistantships, and tutoring experiences that might be available to the speech education student.

For the student planning to teach speech at any level, participation in the future school's speech and dramatic activity program is virtually a given. If it is not a part of the job description, ability to work with these activities will enhance the attractiveness of the education student to a potential employer. Thus work in these areas should be encouraged of all education students in speech, drama, English, other humanities, and the social sciences. It might be a plus for a future science teacher, as well.

Students should first of all participate in the activities--debate, forensics, and drama. In forensics they should try a variety of events, and should observe as many as possible. In drama students should obtain both performance and technical experience, and the technical experience should include both backstage and house management. In most cases non-majors will not be given the responsibility for directing a production, but they might be able to serve as assistant director or stage manager and gain insight into the total production experience in that manner.

Students might also have the opportunity to judge for or help manage at area high school forensics, debate, and drama contests when they have sufficient experience, and such activities should be incorporated into the pre-methods and methods experiences . They should have the opportunity to discuss what they have learned from assisting with such activities and to share experiences, perhaps in one of the education seminar sessions, so that the benefits of the co- and extra-curricular offerings of the speech program can be fully utilized.

Thus the ongoing speech communication program provides valuable experience for the speech education student, but such a curriculum provides valuable experience for the education student with any major.

Pam Cooper, in her keynote address for the Speech Communication Association of Ohio in September 1988, cited three trends in education nationally to which speech communication courses are especially responsive--teaching critical thinking, encouraging cooperative learning, and responding to multi-racial issues that might be found in a classroom. I'd like to develop some of her ideas a bit, as well.

The Essential Undergraduate Curriculum in Speech Communication provides a variety of critical thinking experiences--public speaking, critical listening, argumentation and persuasion, mass media and society, group dynamics and discussion. In addition, it provides a consideration of such things as the role of language in influencing thought, the social effects of communication, and the effects of social changes on communication. Value clarification, influence, and communication responsibility are all a part of the course offerings in the Essential Undergraduate Curriculum, and education students with any major can make use of them in their preparation as teachers.

Similarly, peer coaching and tutoring, cooperative and collaborative work, and establishing colleague relationships are basics in the curriculum. Team approaches in presentations can focus on the process as well as the product, and future teachers can gain valuable experiential as well as academic insights.

Finally, according to Cooper (1988), 90% of all college students majoring in education are white, yet 1/3 of all elementary students are minorities. Speech communication courses can teach students to recognize and value differences in language, meaning, and perspectives. The role of self-concept in communication is explored, sensitivity to value differences among individuals and in groups and audiences is stressed, and the effect of one's past communication experiences on their future communication interactions is recognized. Gender and cultural differences in communication are often explored in speech classes and the impact of sexist and racist language discussed. Sensitivity to handicaps of all types is heightened, and responding to communication apprehensions and communication disorders can be considered. All of these experiences can increase the student's consciousness of diversity in the classroom and can help the future teacher respond more effectively to that diversity.

Extra-curricular and co-curricular activities have the same benefits for the non-speech major in education that they have for the speech major, making him or her more valuable to a potential employer and more

competent and confident when assigned to advise or coach such an activity.

However, for the non-major as much as for the major in speech education, future teachers need the opportunity to synthesize and discuss their classroom and out-of-classroom speech communication experiences.

I will mention briefly one final aspect of an ongoing speech curriculum which is of benefit to future teachers: its insight into and assistance in their professional development. Not all of teachers' professional lives are spent in the classroom. They have professional responsibilities in their individual schools, school systems, local school districts, professional organizations, and the community and nation at large.

The Essential Undergraduate Curriculum can help them in obtaining a position, serving as an effective member of a group and an organization, negotiating issues, supporting colleagues, relating to supervisors, and making presentations for parent-teacher associations, school boards, and voters. Both the content and processes of a well developed speech communication program can enhance the careers and professional lives of our future teachers.

Endnotes

Smitter, Roger, and Buzza, Bonnie W, "The Essential Undergraduate Curriculum in Speech Communication: A Progress Report," Bulletin of the Association for Communication Administration, 60, April 1987, pp. 63-66.

Cooper, Pamela, unpublished keynote address for the Speech Communication Association of Ohio, September 30, 1988.